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AUTHOR	Fuentes, Alejandro Curado; Rokowski, Patricia Edwards
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ABSTRACT

The integration of a corpus-based approach in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) syllabus is one possible course design step in university settings. This paper describes a situation in which Business English is taught by incorporating corpus-driven knowledge and communicative task feedback. Two main goals are pursued in this reciprocal relationship: corpus-based data evaluation in the academic context and corpus material design by focusing on language and content needs in task performance. The subject of Business and Information Technology (BIT) serves as a common core backdrop where English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and ESP meet, providing feedback for Business and Computer English given their related study programs. IT is conceived as a subject area that applies to many others, and its use and applications enable the performance of communicative tasks in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This paper presents a framework for studying IT topics across various disciplines then focuses on the following: approaches to language development and language use and corpus integration (corpus use, task development, and assessing tasks and reviewing the corpus). The paper concludes that BIT is a subject area where both top-down and bottom-up language analyses are simultaneously possible. (Contains 26 bibliographic references.) (SM)

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Use of Corpus in the Business English Classroom: From Lesser to More Specific

Alejandro Curado Fuentes
Patricia Edwards Rokowski
University of Extremadura

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1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of a corpus-based approach in the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) syllabus is enabled as a coherent course design step in university settings (cf. J. Flowerdew, 2001; L. Flowerdew, 2001; Flowerdew, 2002; Curado, 2001). In addition to other linguistic and institutional factors, a corpus-based analysis tends to play a fundamental role in specialised language gradation and methodology (Flowerdew, 2001: 71). Because both a multidisciplinary and common core framework are feasible in ESP (cf. Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), the constitution of a corpus-based approach is highly suitable on the methodological plane. In agreement with Krishnamurthy (2001: 83), two chief principles justify corpus integration demands in the language programme: "A corpus can give us accurate statistics" and "a corpus can provide us with a vast number of real examples".

This paper describes a particular situation where Business English is taught by incorporating corpus-driven knowledge and communicative task feedback. Two main goals are pursued in this reciprocal relationship: Corpus-based data evaluation in the academic context, and corpus material design by focusing on language and content needs. Information Technology (I.T.) is selected as a common core subject field for Business and Computer studies. In this respect, I.T. is conceived as a subject area that applies to many others (a multidisciplinary scope), and I.T. use and applications enable the performance of communicative tasks in EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

Our work herein described thus derives from two facts in ESP / EAP (cf. Thompson, 2002): 1., the need to make EAP teaching material reliable in terms of novelty and content reliance, and 2., the need to provide compatible exploitation of such content according to corpus-driven itemisation. In our case, the learning scenario includes I.T. and the university setting, but also the plausible work-place (businesses

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and institutions). In this sense, EPP (English for Professional Purposes) is integrated within the intended approach.

As language change tends to occur in accordance with the evolution of I.T., developments can cause linguistic problems for the ESP learner. What scholars such as Thompson (2002) propose is a new perspective into ESP from the electronic world -- i.e., internet and self-access study--, based on the combination of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and corpus-driven language learning --cf. Thurstun & Candlin (1998), Johns (1986), and other corpus linguists--. Furthermore, Thompson (2002) refers to the need for establishing common corpus procedures within an effective EAP framework, as many language instructors still ignore corpus exploitation possibilities for language teaching and learning. In this regard, small and medium-sized corpora could be an adequate means of meeting such shared interests and demands in the academic and professional setting (cf. Tribble, 1998; Scott, 2000; Curado, 2002a). In particular, a three-dimensional view of language development is sensed during the corpus exploitation in our courses: A General English scope of phrases and common words in academic contexts, a semi-technical use of Business English, and a specific use of terminology in technical discourse.

2. FRAMEWORK

In keeping with this line of the research, a common core approach in Information Science and Technology can help to pinpoint and establish I.T. topics studied across various disciplines (e.g., Business Science, Computer Science, Library Science, Telecommunications [Sight and Sound], and Audio-visual Communication). It is essential for learners from different fields to be knowledgeable in I.T., since, without a command of I.T. language and content, learners would be at a distinct disadvantage in a highly competitive market, whether they are using computer resources for academic or professional purposes. By following study plans, syllabi, and guidelines from different universities (our own, others from Spain and abroad – cf. Curado, 2002b), subjects and topics are examined as common core across various disciplines.

Four main subject headings can be identified in Business Science, where different I.T. topics receive significant coverage:

a. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

b. ACCOUNTING AND LAW

c. MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

d. STATISTICS AND FINANCE

Under these fields, significant business and computer notions can be classified according to common topic and interest criteria in the study programmes: Database management, technical support, multimedia software, office-based applications, effective customisation, internet use and exploitation, web-based communications, networking, electronic mailing and publishing, copyright protection and information ethics, etc.

In addition, appropriate genres and text types are selected according to the period of development within the study programmes. An example is the textbook or manual (Edwards & Castro, 1997) as a primary reading during the first year of studies, especially in the subject of Statistics, where that genre is required. Figure 1 illustrates the selection made in our Business English corpus based on Business and Information Technology (BIT) criteria.

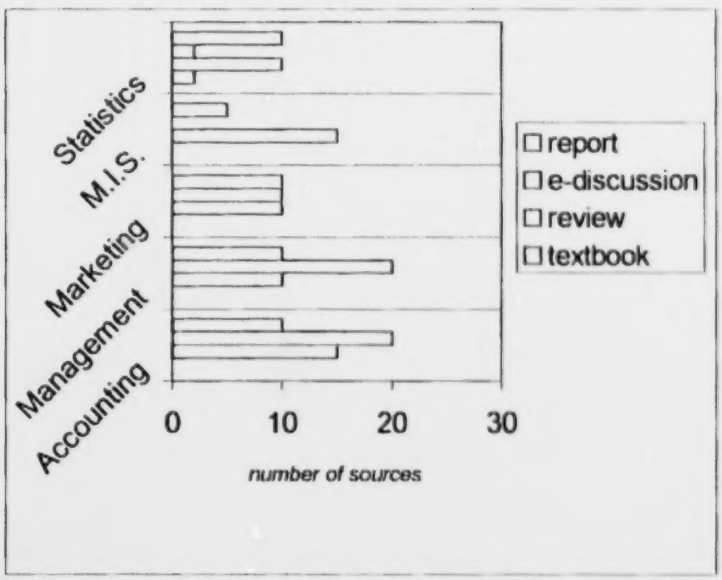

Figure 1: *Contents of the BIT corpus*

Second and third year subjects include M.I.S. (Management Information Systems), Marketing, Management, and Accounting. Electronic discussions are mainly obtained from newsgroups on the internet. This text type constitutes distinct linguistic input for intermediate / advanced learners who wish to exploit academic and conversational writing -- electronic discussions providing a suitable amalgamation of

both--. Reviews refer to brief descriptive articles appearing in newspapers and other related media. They offer evaluations of business and information technology products. Finally, reports tend to fall under a similar academic register category as textbooks and research articles; however, they can often be found between the two in terms of complexity (more descriptive than instructive – cf. Martin, 1985).

3. APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The process of learning is closely related to that of lexical knowledge gain in our approach. Receiving the lexical input and producing it in context are the two boundaries within task development. The key is thus to achieve linguistic competence by activating the received data in a process focus on language learning (cf. Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In this respect, the BIT corpus should serve as a content reference for schemata growth in EAP / EPP (English for Professional Purposes). The objective is to foster instrumental motivation by enabling learners to perceive a content relationship with language use (Donna, 2000: 39). The theory of language learning herein followed agrees with claims postulated as early as 1957 (Firth's views on lexical competence), and as recently as 2002 (Hoey's descriptions of lexical priming).

Corpus linguistics strategies and techniques are used to carry out the corpus exploitation from a pedagogical perspective. This approach entails a practical analysis of corpus sources according to the purposes and conditions provided by the learning setting. Some publications influencing our work in this regard are J. Flowerdew (2001), Nation (2001), Tribble (2001), and Hunston (2002). Flowerdew, for instance, examines three main objectives (task, vocabulary, and grammar) that are interrelated in the design of a syllabus unit (e.g. to write a cohesive paragraph from diagrams, tables, and other visual sources in biology) (Flowerdew, 2001: 84). Nation (2001: 32) focuses on a contrastive analysis of vocabulary size and coverage for university students: How large, but also, how relevant the vocabulary should be is explored by means of computer programmes (*VocabProfile* and *Range*). Tribble (2001: 383) investigates the use of genres in the form of small corpora as rich semantic potentials for communicative tasks. Finally, Hunston (2002: 185) refers to the important fact that corpus material should be

made available to learners, and that their attention should be drawn to particular language features that become highly relevant for task development.

Contextual references can be attached to lexical collocations and phrases in the study of corpus-driven data. Four significant relationships are surveyed in our approach, as Table 1 shows. The example is based on Gavioli (1997: 87), who works with Geology texts.

Context & collocation **(= subject [Geology])**
e.g *land rift*
Context & phrase **(= subject & genre [Geology textbook])**
e.g. *land rift can be defined as*
Context & pattern **(= genre [textbook])**
e.g. _____ *can be defined as*
Context & semantic prosody **(= genre & register [academic])**
e.g. *defined as* (+ FORMAL DEFINITION)

Table 1: *Relationships between context and lexical data*

These data should serve as linguistic pointers of the BIT corpus contents. In other words, by extracting and classifying information such as the one in Table 1, lexical items and units should be aimed at the edification of appropriate corpus-based lexical knowledge. Linguistic competence is then "trained" by means of word- and phrase-level exercises such as word-listing and concordancing. In addition, the macro-structural stage where learners should put this knowledge to the test is in the communicative task, which challenges their capacity to substantiate their command of contextual relationships (e.g., introducing a topic during the delivery of an oral report).

4. LANGUAGE USE AND CORPUS INTEGRATION

4.1. *Corpus use*

In our experience, the application of corpus-based information to the ESP classroom should be done progressively and in accordance with the students' learning needs. The BIT corpus can provide useful contrastive data if, like medicine, it is administered in the right doses and at the right time. Since corpus access can afford a wider and richer view of the lexical items than if only pinpointed through classroom interaction (Hunston, 2002: 184), an obvious exercise could be the concordance

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exploration of frequent content words in the corpus. Some of these are nouns like *data*, *model*, *management*, *analysis*, and *market*. In addition, information from less frequent items can reinforce the semantic profile of words identified in class. Such elements are less common across the genre and subject categories of the specialised corpus, and key in their specific context (hence, more restricted or technical -- e.g. the compound *management control system* in Management--).

A comparative exercise of BIT data with other specific corpora is also a useful way of promoting corpus-based thinking among students. As Table 2 illustrates, medium-sized corpora such as the BIT (650,000 tokens) and IST (Information Science and Technology – 850,000), designed and built for teaching purposes, can offer similar frequency-based positions in the common area of I.T. In contrast, a slightly larger collection such as the HKBSE (Hong Kong Corpus of Business Science and Economics – James and Purchase, 1996) may differ in the case of some word rankings (e.g. *data*, *model*, and *analysis*), and be similar with other items (e.g. *new*, *market*, and *example*). The BNC sampler (two million words) is also included to offer a broader scope than the Business and Information Technology area. The aim is to have learners contrast word use across corpora to induce lexical variation depending on the contextual nature (i.e., subject and genre) of the corpus.

BIT		***HKBSE***	***IST***	***BNC***	
(650 th)		(1 m)	(850 th)	(2 m)	*Tokens*
40%		37.6%	37.09%	36.9%	*TTR*
#					
27	Data	71	36	393	
28	Model	114	156	1251	
40	Management	70	121	769	
42	New	55	411	128	
43	Analysis	169	139	1655	
44	Market	59	524	299	
46	Information	61	20	191	
48	Example	54	25	544	
50	Number	90	38	178	

- BIT = Business and Information Technology Corpus
- HKBSE = Hong Kong Business Science and Economics Corpus
- IST = Information Science and Technology corpus
- BNC = British National Corpus sampler
- TTR = Token to Type ratio (types per 1,000 tokens)

Table 2: *Comparative view of BIT data with other corpora*

The instructor's supervision and direction throughout the activities of concordancing and collocation extraction are crucial for the appropriate production of contrasted items. The analysis should raise awareness regarding the importance of lexical "chunks" as significant semantic units of specific language. Some examples are those derived from contrasting the widely used (semi-technical) items *market* and *data*. Since the collocation *the Stock market* is examined as highly frequent in both BIT and HKBSE, it is regarded as characteristic of business and economics texts. In contrast, *data transfer* is very common in IST, while *data analysis* occurs much more significantly in BIT. Not until students check the verb + noun collocation *gather + data* --less frequent, and yet extended across both corpora--, do they in fact perceive a first lexical nexus between IST and BIT, related to the action of electronic data collection.

4.2. *Task development*

Communicative tasks in our ESP context include four to six written and oral assignments to be performed and completed during the semester. These are handed out at the beginning of the course and assigned by groups or pairs. Some of the challenges involve the oral presentation of results and conclusions derived from business surveys and market analysis, web page construction where project work is designed and described, simulations of business meetings that deal with professional issues, news reporting simulations based on actual and real stories previously viewed and examined, written technical reports evaluating business technology and electronic commerce, etc. It is important for much of the bibliographic information used in the tasks to come from the BIT corpus. This means that a great deal of the ideas, notions, developments, and methods to be considered for task performance are conceived and exploited through direct access to the specialised language.

The aim lies in exposure to the key language during both the project work and corpus-driven classroom activities, in order to enable learners to build up suitable lexical competence for BIT. For instance, their preference for *market analysis* and not *the analysis of the market* demonstrates their awareness of the priming of lexis for definite purposes in BIT, where the collocation is favoured. They thus grow conscious of their need to know certain words in specific combinations and phrases, and for actual academic / professional use. In our view, the effect of corpus-driven exercises (for the brain) is similar to weight lifting (for the body): It increases volume (= mental capacity). In turn, communicative tasks are regarded as an endurance work-out; their consistent practise leads to a steadily improved condition (= language command).

Learners make plain that their linguistic demands are often based on their lack of specific vocabulary for task competence. Figure 2 points up their greatly felt need of semi-technical lexis (i.e., frequent and distributed nouns, adjectives, and verbs across the BIT corpus – e.g., *data*, *management*, *analysis*, *market*, *new*, *available*, *run*, *gather*, etc). More restricted items (specific or technical), based on one subject or genre alone, are also considered important, but to a lesser degree (e.g. a compound like *management production control system* in Management). Grammatical elements (e.g., passives, modals, conditionals, etc) are less significant during task performance mainly due to their already existent high-intermediate level of grammar.

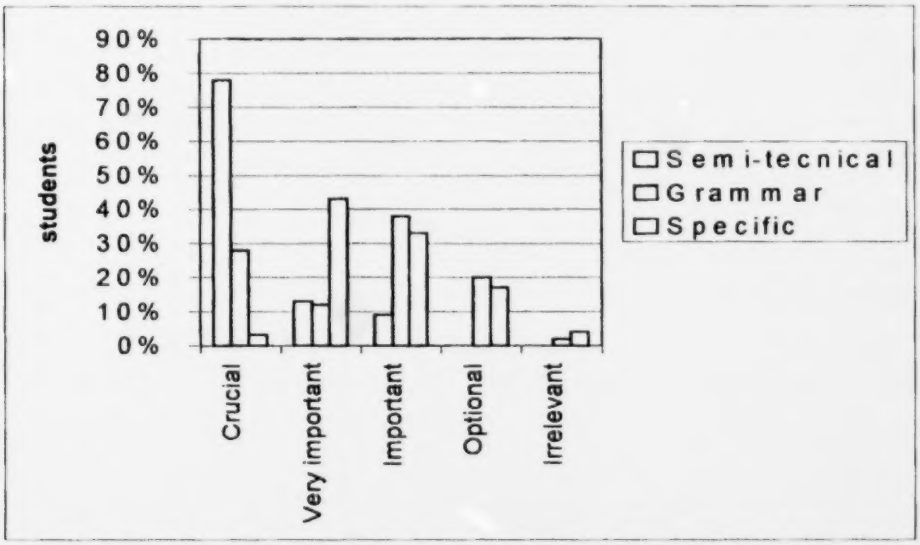

Figure 2: *Learners' evaluation of linguistic needs for tasks* according to learners.

When questioned on their preferred types of tasks, learners tend to choose two: The oral presentation given in the form of the academic lecture, and the job interview in which they must defend their CVs as professionally as possible. Such inclinations lead to the performance of two main sets of discourse features in the EAP / EPP settings (Table 3):

ACADEMIC / PROFESSIONAL SKILLS	
MONOLOGUES	***DIALOGUES***
(ACADEMIC -- lectures)	(PROFESSION -- interviews)
TEXTBOOK-LIKE	CONVERSATIONAL

DISCOURSE MOVE	QUESTION / ANSWER
UNIVERSITY STAND	FORUM
+ TECHNICAL	LESS CONSTRAINED
LESS PERSONAL	+ PERSONAL

Table 3: *Sets of discourse features favoured by learners in tasks*

Given the data obtained from communicative work in the classroom, it is highly convenient to revise the BIT corpus content in terms of the academic and professional purposes to which it is put.

4.3. *Assessing tasks and reviewing the corpus*

A communicative development of the tasks involves the activation of subject area knowledge (schemata) and lexical competence (command of lexical forms, positions, function, and meaning in a specialised type of discourse – cf. Nation, 1990). In our experience, being aware of the corpus data for task exploitation is the first major step. However, a consecutive crucial stage is to establish an adequate lexical density for specific purposes, in agreement with Nation (2001). In this respect, we find that a middle "ground" of lexical use – chiefly a semi-technical word behaviour—is most relevant to the learning scenario. Students' responses to questionnaires handed out in class demonstrate this sense of comfort with plenty of semi-technical word use in EAP / EPP / EST (for both oral and written work, from writing summaries to giving explanations on how to run a piece of equipment).

Corpus data can therefore be revised and "re-visited" by focusing on those linguistic areas that bequeath greater rewards to the language user. In this sense, the corpus is re-examined as an instrument providing the necessary ingredients –borrowing Aston's analogy (2000), — for the "cooking" process of learning. In addition, the corpus data, being properly segmented and facilitated to the learner, can be integrated in the top-down analysis which every communicative task entails.

A task demanding learners to conduct a market analysis in which corporate companies are described, for instance, can suggest the application of activities focusing on open collocations. An example is Table 4, providing fill-in-the-gap exercises where the aim is to realise and produce common core lexical units.

GUESS THE COLLOCATE(S):	
_____	+ LAW /
	+ IMAGE
	+ GOVERNANCE
	+ REPORT
	+ SECTOR
ALL TASKS > ACADEMIC COMBINATIONS (OPEN)	

Table 4: *Example of open collocation exercise for communicative task*

The fact that combinations like *corporate law*, *corporate image*, and *corporate report*, among others, are highly common in the BIT corpus, can help learners to account for their use with ease in the topics selected. The disposition of frequent and widely distributed linguistic data in the corpus is, in this sense, quite pertinent. A different case is that of less frequent vocabulary or even non-existent word use in the BIT corpus. As a complementary task work-out, lexical behaviour should be easily recognisable through corpus access (mainly concordancing and word-list activities), otherwise, we find that students can soon lose heart. As a result, a re-orientation of the corpus contents can be of help if done with the sole purpose of making lexical items clearly visible for certain situations.

An example is the distribution of genre-based items for the task of writing essay introductions. Genre samples are selected and distributed for student use; then, the structures demanded (collocations and phrases) can be checked. In the process, a corpus-driven exercise like Table 5 can provide insightful value for writing aims. It is ultimately up to the learners to come up with their choice of lexical units for the writing of essay introductions (a sample is offered in Table 6, where key genre-based lexical "chunks" appear in bold).

MATCH CONSTRUCTIONS WITH THE TEXT TYPES IN WHICH YOU THINK THEY ARE COMMON:	
***In this paper we…*--**	**JOURNAL ARTICLE**
***It was argued that…*—**	**CONFERENCE PAPER**
***I think it's gonna be …*--**	**E-DISCUSSION**
***Sales analysis* (+ company) *reported that…*—**	**REPORT**
***Get your company started*--**	**REVIEW**
***Our paper*—**	**ABSTRACT**
***In the current example*--**	**TEXTBOOK**
***He says "…*--**	**CASES**
.. *" says* (name of a person) --	**NEWS**

Table 5: *Corpus-driven exercise as a complementary task practise*

***In this paper we** want to defend the position of good negotiators as persuaders. **We believe that there are** different types of negotiators, bad, good, very good, and charismatic. **It is important to** differentiate the four types using three main characteristics: 1. being concise and clear, 2. being able to communicate verbally and emotionally, 3. being able to persuade and convince. **Regarding this** last premise, **we think that** charismatic negotiators are the best negotiators due to...*

Table 6: ***Example of essay introduction (genre-based items are highlighted)***

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has given a particular description of Business English being taught by integrating corpus-driven data and communicative tasks in the language syllabus. A double-fold goal has been pursued: Evaluating corpus information in the academic context, and re-structuring corpus material according to target language and content needs in task performance. The subject area of BIT (Business and Information Technology) serves as a common core backdrop where EAP and EPP meet, providing feedback for Business and Computer English, given their related study programmes. In this regard, BIT is approached as a subject area where both top-down and bottom-up language analyses are simultaneously possible. In the former type, the learning process in BIT is considered instrumental, a key term in ESP's own methodology, whereas in the latter type of analysis, the specific medium sized corpus is regarded as a supporting tool for contrasting specific aims in communicative tasks.

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Corpora used

- BIT = Business and Information Technology Corpus (A. Curado, 2002 -- classroom application & research)
- BNC = British National Corpus sampler (Burnard, L. & M. Barlow, 1998 -- sampler with various genres)
- HKBSE = Hong Kong Business Science and Economics Corpus (G. James & J. Purchase, 1996 -- textbook research)
- IST = Information Science and Technology corpus (A. Curado, 2000 -- classroom application & research)

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